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CHANGES IN SOVIET POLICY
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STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE
US ARMY WAR COLLEGE
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania

⑨ Research memo

⑥ **CHANGES IN SOVIET POLICY TOWARD IRAN,**
by

⑩ Robert G. Irani
⑪ 5 April 1980

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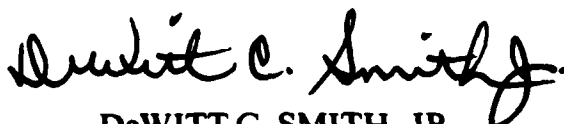
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FOREWORD

This memorandum evolved from the Military Policy Symposium on "The Soviet Union in the Third World: Success and Failure," which was hosted by the Strategic Studies Institute in the Fall of 1979. During the Symposium, academic and government experts discussed a number of issues concerning this area which will have a continuing impact on US strategy. This memorandum considers one of these issues.

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This memorandum was prepared as a contribution to the field of national security research and study. As such, it does not reflect the official view of the College, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense.



DeWITT C. SMITH, JR.
Major General, USA
Commandant

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

DR. ROBERT G. IRANI joined the Strategic Studies Institute in 1975. He graduated from Glenville State College with a bachelor's degree in history and social sciences, earned a master's degree in international relations from the American University, and a second master's degree and a doctorate in government and politics and international relations from the University of Maryland. Dr. Irani's research abroad includes trips to both sides of the Persian Gulf and one year of field research as a Research-Associate at the Institute for International Political and Economic Studies, Tehran, Iran. His published works include, *American Diplomacy: An Option Analysis of the Azerbaijan Crisis, 1945-1946, (1978)*; *Iran's Foreign Policy, 1941-1974: A Selective Bibliography, (1976)*; and several articles in English and Farsi for professional journals.

CHANGES IN SOVIET POLICY TOWARD IRAN

The evolution of Soviet foreign policy toward Iran during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-78) reflected the changes in the international system, as the Soviet Union and the United States rose from the ashes of World War II to become the two principal centers of power. Before World War II Iran's relations with the USSR reflected British-Soviet rivalry in that country; after the war they were increasingly influenced by American-Soviet rivalry, as the United States began to replace Britain as the principal anchor of Western influence in the Middle East.

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, following in the footsteps of other Persian monarchs, pursued a cautious, calculated, tactful policy in Iran's relations with the United States and the Soviet Union, in order to ensure Iran's independence and territorial integrity and to maintain himself on the Peacock Throne. Despite the Shah's preference for the United States he sought to pursue a relationship with the two rival superpowers that would provide both the United States and the Soviet Union with a stake in the maintenance of an independent Iran. This effort remained an underlying theme of Iran's foreign policy throughout the rule of the last member of the Pahlavi dynasty.

The purpose of this essay is to interpret the changing dimensions of Soviet foreign policy toward Iran since the outset of the Second World War. Several premises undergird the argument. First, from the perspective of a small nation located contiguous to a superpower, Soviet objectives toward Iran should be viewed in historical context, ranging from the traditional Tsarist and Stalinist policy of aggrandizement at Iran's expense to contemporary detente and good-neighborliness. Second, the inequitable relationship between Moscow and Tehran, reflecting the immense disparity of power between an unpredictable giant and its relatively small neighbor, leads Iran to seek to ensure its survival by aligning itself with another giant, the United States—which at times appears equally unpredictable—in order to try to balance superpower interests. In sum, Iran's location directly below the Soviet Union is a geopolitical reality which has left a deep, permanent impression on Iranian leaders in their efforts to stabilize Tehran's precarious position between Moscow and Washington.

In a global context there are two major interpretations of the ultimate direction of Soviet policy toward Iran and the Persian Gulf area. The first holds that the Soviet Union essentially pursues a defensive objective in this part of the world, aimed at preventing Iran from being used as a base against the Soviet Union. The second interpretation portrays Soviet objectives in an offensive context aimed at weakening Western influence and increasing that of the Soviet Union in the area, in order to dominate or neutralize the countries located directly adjacent to the Soviet Union on the Eurasian landmass and to achieve the historic Tsarist drive for a warm-water port. These two divergent interpretations of Soviet policy are based upon two different sets of value-laden assumptions, difficult to validate or deny. At bottom, however, it is difficult to deny that Soviet leaders probably view Iran and the Persian Gulf area as essential elements of their "backyard," and that the Soviets are committed to increase their influence and reduce the influence of their adversaries in this "backyard." In order to accomplish such a long-range goal, the Soviet Union has shifted its tactics from direct, offensive, military, and ideological methods of the Stalinist period to a more subtle posture based on the use of expanded commercial and economic ties in an essentially nonideological, defensive-oriented context.

IRAN'S STRATEGIC LOCATION

Iran has been a strategic target for both Tsarist and Soviet Russia, as shown by the occupation of northern Iran during both World War I and World War II.' Indeed, during the 19th and 20th centuries, Iran had on several occasions served as a sphere of competitive rivalry and intervention between Great Britain and the Tsarist and later Soviet regimes.

During World War II Iran served as a bridge for Allied victory against Nazi Germany—a critical land-route for the Western Allies, particularly the United States, to supply the Soviet Union with war materiel. Because of Iran's location, Soviet leaders continue to maintain a critical national security interest in preventing it from being used as a bridge to invade the Soviet heartland in any future conflict. Iran has had no choice in selecting the Soviet Union as its powerful, northern neighbor, but it has had to deal with this geographic *fait accompli* as both a beneficiary and a victim of changing Soviet policies and of diverging US-USSR interests in the Middle East. Iran's foreign policy, as a result, tends to reflect the changing international system and the dynamics of US-USSR policies toward Iran and the Persian Gulf area. Iran serves a pawn on the chessboard of superpower rivalry on the periphery of the Eurasian landmass, despite its efforts to pursue an independent foreign policy based on "equidistance" between Moscow and Washington.

Iran's propinquity to the Soviet Union will continue to require the calculated, diligent, and methodical pursuit of a balanced foreign policy by the leaders of the Islamic Republic. It would be naive for such a small nation to assume that the Soviet Union has permanently revised its traditional long-range objective of expanding its influence in the direction of the Persian Gulf, since closed societies and authoritarian, centralized systems such as the Soviet Union tend to maintain their long-range objectives, while allowing for flexible tactics adaptable to the needs of a given situation.

If the US/Allied reliance on Persian Gulf oil continues to expand, so will their interests in defense against potential Soviet actions to deny the West access to this vital, nonreplenishable resource. The Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact nations will probably also become dependent upon Persian Gulf oil in the

1980's, a situation which will further expand Soviet interests in Iran and the Persian Gulf area. In short, Iran's contiguity to the Soviet Union, Soviet ambitions to gain access to the warm waters of the Persian Gulf in order to project Soviet power directly into the Indian Ocean area, and the rising global demand for oil are crucial strategic factors that will continue to ensure Iran's significance in the East-West global equilibrium. Under these circumstances it will be difficult for Iranian leaders to secure their future from potential external intervention, rivalry, and intrigue.

EVOLUTION OF SOVIET POLICY TOWARD IRAN

Soviet policy under Stalin had "a remarkable trait of continuity with that of the old policy of the Tsars."² The Tsarist Russian interest to expand southward in the direction of the Persian Gulf was an historic objective of imperial Russia and a continued objective of Soviet Russia during the reign of Stalin. In the contemporary international environment, however, it would be unrealistic to expect the Soviet Union to activate a grand design to march southward to Iran, toward the warm waters of the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea as long as relative peace, prosperity, and detente characterize the international environment. In such an international milieu, the Soviet Union can best maximize its gain through commercial, economic ties and military sales with the nations of this area at the expense of the West. However, in a resurging cold war environment—one which may be viewed by Moscow as the precursor of a world war—Soviet military intervention could again occur.

Articles VI and XIII of the Soviet-Iranian Treaty of 1921 were used as an excuse for Soviet military intervention at the onset of the Second World War. Article VI states that:

If a third party should attempt to carry out a policy of usurpation by means of armed intervention in Persia, or if such Power should desire to use Persian territory as a base of operations against Russia, or if a foreign Power should threaten the frontiers of Federal Russia or those of its allies, and if the Persian Government should not be able to put a stop to such menace after having been once called upon to do so by Russia, Russia shall have the right to advance her troops into the Persian interior for the purpose of carrying out the military operations necessary for its defense. Russia undertakes, however, to withdraw her troops from Persian territory as soon as the danger has been removed.¹

Article XIII of this Treaty stipulates that "the Persian Government, for its part, promises not to cede to a third power, or to its subjects, the concessions and property restored to Persia by virtue of the present Treaty, and to maintain those rights for the Persian Nation."

The occupation of northern Iran by the Soviet Union during World War II coupled with Soviet political intrigues, Soviet military interventions, and the Soviet role in the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Mahabad in northern Iran were the most vivid violations of the spirit of the wartime Allied promises to support Iran's independence and territorial integrity. The ultimate withdrawal of Soviet forces from northern Iran took place because of the tactful diplomacy of Ahmad Ghavam-es-Saltaneh, Iran's Premier, the existence of the newly established United Nations, and the firm, forceful support of Harry S. Truman.

US support was indeed critical in the withdrawal of Soviet troops from northern Iran, and Iranian leaders recognized and appreciated the significance of this support, and they maintained a clearly pro-American foreign policy posture after the Second World War. Thus the Stalinist attempt to incorporate northern Iran into the Soviet orbit and neutralize the rest of Iran failed. The new US policy of containment of the Soviet Union, while it succeeded in stifling Soviet expansion of Iran, marked the dawn of the cold war and a new and dangerous era in the international system.

During the early 1950's, the people of Iran struggled against British domination of Iran's oil industry. The Mossadegh era is the forerunner of rising nationalism which reached its zenith in Iranian history during the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79. In the 1950's the United States misunderstood and underestimated the significance of the nationalist movement in Iran. The Soviets supported the movement insofar as it aimed at reducing American and British influence, but their main instrument was support of the Tudeh (Communist) Party in its attempt to gain control of Iran.

The main organ of the nationalist movement, the National Coalition Front (NCF), was formed in 1950 as a result of the union of four political parties represented in the Parliament. It was led by Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh, designated by the Shah as Iran's Prime Minister. During his premiership the Tudeh Party was the

most active political mechanism in Iran, playing a leading role in demonstrations, strikes, and other activities in trade unions and in the oilfields. The alienated, urban youth identified with the Tudeh Party.

The Tudeh Party disguised its pro-Soviet goals under the banner of Iranian nationalism. As a result, Tudeh members successfully penetrated the NCF during the Mossadegh era, tainting the NCF and its image in the West. The pro-Shah elements quickly emphasized this aspect of the NCF and the Mossadegh period, presenting the NCF as a misguided, pro-Communist element—a myth propagated systematically by the pro-Shah factions. This prevented the Shah from recognizing the growing long-range power and potential of the NCF, which would develop into a vital, legitimate, popular, and highly influential segment of the Iranian society in the 1970's. This self-deception and false myth ultimately led to the Shah's ouster from power in 1979.

The Shah left Iran in 1953 but was returned to power within a few days, reportedly with the assistance of the Central Intelligence Agency. After his return to power he suppressed the NCF and jailed or exiled its prominent leaders. The Tudeh Party was outlawed, and with US and Israeli assistance Iran's national secret service (SAVAK) was established in the 1950's.

One of the failures of the Soviet Union in the Middle East has been its inability to build strong Communist parties in the region. The opposition by Middle Eastern leaders to communism as an ideology has been exemplified by the determination of Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and to some extent Syria to maintain a certain distance from the Kremlin. These Mideastern nations opposed the Kremlin's attempts to establish, maintain, and support Communist parties in their countries because, in their view, Communist parties sought to gain power as instruments of Moscow. The inability of the Tudeh Party to gain and retain power in Iran reflects Moscow's larger failure to develop a successful Communist party in the Middle East.

A Tudeh Party conspiracy in Iran's army and air force in 1954, directed by a Soviet military attache, increased the Shah's suspicion of Soviet objectives. Despite this occurrence, however, the Shah was not unreceptive toward a rapprochement with the Soviet Union. The Shah's official visit to Moscow in 1956 led to the signing of a 3-year commercial agreement which made the Soviet

Union, once again, one of Iran's major customers. By 1957, twenty-one percent of Iran's exports were destined for the Soviet Union.⁵

Nevertheless, Iran was in a precarious security position vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, and the Shah chose to align Iran closely with the United States. As a result, the Shah, without hesitation, joined the Western-sponsored alliance known as the Baghdad Pact, later renamed the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). Thereafter, US-Iranian ties expanded substantially. CENTO was considered a bulwark against international communism in this part of the Middle East. Comprised of Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United Kingdom with active US participation, CENTO served as a major component in the implementation of the Western policy of containment of the Soviet Union. In 1959 the United States and Iran signed a bilateral executive defense agreement to cooperate in promoting the security and defense of CENTO members.⁶ By its association with each member of CENTO through separate bilateral executive defense agreements, the United States was successful in building a "chain of friendship" between Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. US participation in CENTO expanded significantly.⁷

Prior to signing the 1959 bilateral defense agreement with the United States, the Shah had rejected a Soviet proposal to sign a treaty of friendship and nonaggression. By signing the defense agreement with the principal adversary of the Soviet Union, the Shah provoked bitter Soviet attacks. He was depicted as a US puppet, a lackey of Western imperialism, and a traitor to Islam. Iranian Communists in exile in East Germany broadcasted inflammatory criticism of the Shah.⁸

As a close friend of Moscow's, Egypt's Nasser also launched a campaign against the Shah which in 1960 resulted in the rupture of diplomatic relations between Egypt and Iran. But this psychological war waged by Moscow and Egypt against the Shah proved to be short-lived. It ended in late 1960 in the exchange of a series of notes between the Shah and Khrushchev in which the Shah expressed his desire to maintain friendly relations with the Soviet Union, provided that such relations were based on mutual respect. The Shah, however, turned aside Soviet objections to Iran's defense ties with the United States. Finally Khrushchev realized that such objections were futile. The Soviet Union relented and a

rapprochement was eventually reached that respected the Shah's perceived needs for Iran's defense ties with the United States.

The turning point in Soviet-Iranian relations came in September 1962, when the Shah gave Moscow assurance that his government would not permit the establishment of any foreign military base in Iran. As one author points out "even before the Cuban missile crisis, Iran had already moved to improve relations with the Soviet Union. In fact, the Iranian negotiating team was in Moscow during the crisis."⁹ For the Soviets, these assurances from the Shah removed the last barriers toward good relations with Iran. Soviet commentators began to praise the Shah's land reforms which they had previously criticized.¹⁰

During Soviet President Brezhnev's official visit to Tehran in November 1963, several agreements were signed covering transit, economic and technical assistance, and the joint utilization of the resources adjacent to the rivers bordering Iran and the Soviet Union (Atrak and Aras). A joint cultural society was also established in both Moscow and Tehran. Moreover, several East European nations extended credit to Iran, which eventually resulted in a huge trade flow among Iran, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe.¹¹

Perception of the vulnerability of his throne, major domestic economic problems in Iran, and Soviet pressure were the principal factors which in the early 1960's forced the Shah to improve Iran's ties with the Soviet Union. The Shah had introduced a land reform program, and his so-called "White Revolution" amounted to authoritarian, subjective changes dictated by him. He had suspended the Parliament, and the Iranian government faced a severe financial crisis which required drastic economic cuts. While the Soviet Union pressured the Shah against allowing the use of Iran as a US base, the United States pressed the Shah to improve Iran's standard of living and improve the lot of its people. The Shah of Iran stood on shaky ground. The arbitrary implementation of his land reform ended with the alienation of Shia Islamic leaders and the exile from Iran in 1963 of Ayatollah Rouhallah Khomeini, one of the staunch anti-land reform, anti-Shah leaders. This was the political phenomenon which germinated the seed of the destruction of the Pahlavi dynasty.

Domestic pressures and the opposition to the Shah and his programs from Iran's religious factions, the traditional landed

aristocracy, the rising middle class, the students, and the merchants were enormous internal pressures on the Shah in the 1960's. Instead of meeting these domestic needs the Shah focused his attention on external affairs such as seeking to improve Iran's relations with the Soviet Union, which had criticized the Shah and his program. The Shah wanted to reduce external pressures on his throne, because he perceived that satisfying the United States and the Soviet Union were of greater significance in insuring the survival of the Pahlavi dynasty than domestic consensus and support. This was a misperception which was to haunt him in 1978.

The "thaw" between the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1960's signaled changes in relations between the Soviet Union and its neighbors such as Iran, in the broader framework of the end of the cold war and the demise of the myth of a monolithic international communism centered in Moscow. The schism between Moscow and Peking surfaced and shattered the perceived monolithic threat which served as the basis for Western threat perception consensus.

These drastic changes in the global environment served the mutual advantage of Tehran and Moscow in expanding their commercial and economic ties. The Shah's visit to the Soviet Union in 1965 was a clear indicator of improved Iran-Soviet relations and the "thaw" in the international system. Soviet leaders expressed to the Shah their interest in the maintenance of world peace, reduction of tension, and expansion of cooperation. The joint communique issued by the Soviet and Iranian governments in Moscow after the Shah's visit expressed their mutual interest in expanding economic and commercial ties.¹²

The Shah also visited Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Rumania, and Yugoslavia. He was praised throughout Eastern Europe. For example, according to the Sofia Communique, the people of Bulgaria had the "highest praise for the initiatives of His Imperial Majesty the Shah in his campaign against illiteracy." The Poles praised the Shah for his "progressive foreign policy" and expressed their recognition of Iran's "progress." Meanwhile, the Tudeh Party members in exile in Eastern Europe criticized the Eastern European governments for such "excesses" in praising a ruler whom they considered "a reactionary monarch hated by his people."¹³

During the 1960's the Soviet Union, in return for a long-term sale

of Iranian natural gas at extremely favorable terms, assisted Iran in its industrialization drive by building its first steel mill and by constructing its first machine tool industries. The Soviets expanded Iran's railroads, developed some of its coal mines, constructed two hydroelectric projects on the Aras River, built the Mugham Dam and a hydroelectric complex, and laid its first natural gas pipeline across the rugged Iranian plateau to the Soviet Union. The Iranian natural gas pipeline began in the borough of Bid-e-Boland in the oil-rich, southwestern province of Khuzestan and connected almost 700 miles to the north with the city of Astara, USSR. A second Iranian natural gas pipeline to the Soviet Union, planned during the Shah's regime, would traverse over 840 miles, and could have provided the Soviet Union with 2.26 billion cubic feet of gas daily;¹⁴ however, disagreements over the price of natural gas may result in its permanent cancellation. According to the agreement pertaining to the construction of the second gas pipeline, the Soviet Union would supply Austria, Czechoslovakia, France, and West Germany the same amount of gas Iran supplied to the Soviet Union. Iran would, however, be reimbursed directly for its natural gas in hard currency by the Europeans, and the Soviets would collect transit fees for gas delivered to Europe.¹⁵ The price of gas set under the second pipeline agreement is \$1.25 per cubic foot, which is higher than the price the Soviets pay Iran under the first pipeline,¹⁶ but it is still much lower than the relative rise in cost of other sources of energy.

Trade between Iran and the Soviet Union grew substantially in the late 1960's, more than doubling between 1965 and 1969. In July 1966 Tehran announced that it was considering the purchase of surface-to-air missiles from the Soviet Union because Iran's oil installations at the northern mouth of the Persian Gulf, particularly at Kharg Island, were vulnerable to Iraqi forces equipped with Soviet weapons. The Soviet Union failed to express any enthusiasm regarding Iran's announcement, and Tehran turned to Washington for such weapons.¹⁷

The Shah, during the remaining period of his rule, concentrated his attention on ambitious, extravagant plans to make Iran the self-proclaimed policeman of the Persian Gulf area, particularly after the British announced their plan to withdraw the bulk of their forces from the Persian Gulf in 1969. US-Iranian foreign policy objectives converged on most major bilateral, regional, and

international issues. For its part, the Soviet Union essentially viewed the Shah in positive and pragmatic terms, and the Shah tried hard to keep both superpowers content in their relations with Iran. In return, both Moscow and Washington supported the Shah and paid tributes to him for his leadership in modernizing Iran.

The Shah neglected the basic needs of the Iranian people and focused his attention on grand military projects aimed at fulfilling his personal vision of Persia's role in history. Thus it is ironic that the Soviet leadership praised the Shah, ignoring the fact that he was a Western-oriented, pro-American dictator who had outlawed the only Communist party in Iran, and who continued to exile and jail Communists and their sympathizers in Iran. Yet by the early 1970's the Soviets referred to their borders with Iran as "the frontiers of peace and good neighborliness."¹⁸

From the mid-1960's to the mid-1970's, the Soviet Union managed to become one of Iran's top trading partners. Soviet investments in Iran became one of "the largest undertakings by that country anywhere in the world."¹⁹ By assisting Iran in its industrialization the Soviet Union improved Iranian-Soviet relations to a considerable extent. The Soviets pursued a responsible, pragmatic, nonideological policy toward Iran—a policy aimed at improved relations with a neighboring country.

In October 1972 a long-term economic agreement, expected to quadruple Soviet-Iranian trade within 5 years, was signed by the Shah during his visit to Moscow. In early 1973 Kosygin visited the Shah in Tehran and the two leaders announced their "firm conviction" that questions pertaining to the Persian Gulf area should be resolved without interference by external powers.²⁰

Increasingly, however, the Shah's extravagant arms purchases annoyed Iraq and its Soviet patron. More frequent expressions of displeasure emanated from the Soviet Union after the October 1973 War. Kosygin's statement during his 1974 visit to Tehran, warning the Shah that "the policy of dealing from a position of strength and its associated arms race have been a heavy burden on the peoples that began to pursue such a policy but that have not become stronger as a result,"²¹ was probably intended as support for Iraq. Meanwhile the Congress and the academic community in the United States was expressing a deep concern over the Shah's arms buildup and his failure to deal with serious socioeconomic problems in Iran.²²

The Soviet effort to create a collective security system in South Asia failed to receive the support of the Shah, despite some nodding acquiescence by Iran's Premier Amir Abbas Hoveyda, as an indication of possible support for the Soviet efforts. For the most part, the Shah continued to perceive Soviet objectives in South Asia in expansionist terms, and he welcomed the inclusion of the PRC in South Asian affairs as a constructive, stabilizing force.

THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION OF 1978-79 AND THE SOVIET UNION

The full extent of the actual Soviet involvement in Iran, covert or overt, during the 1978-79 upheavals, remains unclear. At the present time there is little evidence available to indicate an overt, direct Soviet involvement in instigating the upheavals in Iran, despite assertions to the contrary by pro-Shah elements inside and outside Iran. However, the Soviet Union has contributed and will continue to contribute to the upheavals in Iran, and it will be prepared to lend assistance if and when the opportunity arises for the creation of a revolutionary, anti-Western, pro-Soviet regime in Iran.

During the first phase of the revolution, prior to the designation of Shahpour Bakhtiar as Iran's Premier, official Soviet pronouncements were supportive of the Shah. According to CIA Director Stansfield Turner, Soviet intelligence services felt that Iran's "bubbles of discontent would be kept under control."²³ As Mr. Turner points out, the Soviet Union took a public anti-Shah stance only after it was clear that the Shah would lose the battle against Iran's fervent nationalists. Furthermore, Soviet leaders carefully watched US responses toward the Shah and were probably uncertain of the extent of US support for the Shah. This uncertainty may have triggered Brezhnev's November 1978 statement in which he clearly depicted the arrival of foreign troops in Iran as "menacing Soviet security" in accordance with Article VI of the 1921 Soviet-Iranian Treaty.²⁴ In response to Brezhnev's statement, President Carter asserted that the United States had "no intention of interfering in the internal affairs of Iran," and that it had "no intention of permitting others to interfere in the internal affairs of Iran."²⁵ He added that Iran's upheavals had been "exacerbated by uncontrolled statements made from foreign

nations that encourage bloodbaths and violence,"²⁶ a statement which was aimed at clandestine propaganda beamed into Iran against both the Shah and the United States from the Soviet Union. One station, known as "The National Voice of Iran," reportedly located in Baku, stated in January 1979 that: "Now that the Shah has gone, it is the turn of the Americans. US imperialism should be kicked out of the country and to hell."²⁷

In late January 1979, *Pravda* itself stated that the Shah's fate should be a warning to other countries which cooperate with the United States. By this time *Pravda* was supporting Ayatollah Khomeini because, it said, the ayatollahs were opposed to the Shah's tyranny.²⁸ Pro-Soviet groups in Iran were by now very active in the effort to sweep away the remnants of the Shah's regime. Iran's Communists supported Khomeini's victory, as *Pravda* indicated, as "only the first step on the road to final popular victory."²⁹ In late January 1979 a group of 5,000 to 10,000 Marxists and other leftists marched through Tehran. One Marxist group, in a letter to Ayatollah Khomeini, warned Iran's leader and his followers against any "attempt to monopolize the revolution as a pretext to revive the Inquisition," and opposed the institution of a single party system in Iran.³⁰

The Tudeh Party and other radical groups were highly influential in Iran's oilfields. According to the Department of State, the Tudeh Party itself had about 2,000 members in Iran, nearly half of whom worked in the oilfields. Marxist groups in general, however, were estimated to have up to 20,000 members and "sympathizers" in Iran. In addition to the Tudeh, the Iranian oilfields were also infiltrated by two other Marxist groups: the "People's Sacrifice Guerrillas" and the "People's Strugglers." They were, according to US intelligence analysts, "very small, but well-disciplined and well-organized."

The Fedayeen Khalgh, another small, highly effective, extremely well-organized, and armed group of Communists actively participated in the Iranian Revolution in 1978-1979. However, unlike the Tudeh Party, the Fedayeen Khalgh continues to retain its independence from the Soviet Union and aspires to institute a national version of communism in Iran.

The Soviet Union recognized Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Republic on February 12, 1979, expressing Soviet readiness to develop a relationship based on "equality, good neighborliness,

and respect for national sovereignty and noninterference in each other's internal affairs."³¹ Prior to the Soviet Union's recognition of the new regime, Yasir Arafat had reportedly conveyed to the Soviet leaders Ayatollah Khomeini's assurances that the Islamic Republic of Iran would expand its commercial and economic ties with the Soviet Union.³² The validity of this report, however, remains to be seen, because the leadership of the Islamic Republic has systematically criticized the Shah for "knuckling under the pressures of the big powers and sacrificing the country's interests."³³ In July 1979 these charges against the Shah were reiterated after the Islamic Republic cancelled the rest of the second gas pipeline project which would have exported Iranian natural gas to the Soviet Union in place of Soviet gas destined for some of the European countries.³⁴ The Islamic Republic appeared to be interested in expanding its economic ties with the Soviet Union only so long as such expansion was equitable and in Iran's national interests.

The Islamic Republic of Iran appears to be committed to reduce the potential for exploitation of Iran by any external power, and to a policy of "equidistance" between both Moscow and Washington. The withdrawal of Iran from the Central Treaty Organization and Iran's unilateral pronouncements to revoke both its 1959 defense agreement with the United States, and Article VI of the 1921 Soviet-Iranian Treaty simultaneously, indicate the Islamic Republic's dedication to this policy. The leaders of the Islamic Republic are quite aware of Iran's strategic location in a zone of potential superpower conflict, and that is precisely why they prefer to follow a "nonaligned" foreign policy posture.

The ouster of the Shah has ensured Iran's withdrawal from the Western orbit, a development which must please Moscow. The severance of Iran's ties with Israel and South Africa, the stoppage of Iran's oil shipments to those two countries, and the Islamic Republic's explicit announcement of support for the Palestine Liberation Organization also probably pleased Moscow—particularly since these moves were coupled with substantial increases in the price of oil and with the closure of US intelligence networks in northern Iran that closely watched Soviet military activities.³⁵ In this broad context, the establishment of a revolutionary Islamic republic in Iran could be interpreted as a benefit to the Soviet Union, because it upsets the pro-Western

balance in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula.

In the long run, however, the Islamic Republic of Iran essentially faces the same foreign policy and defense challenges which were faced by the Pahlavi regime. Iran—located in a zone of potential superpower conflict, between two severe regional conflicts (Arab-Israeli and the Indo-Pakistani), and torn by various separatist movements (Kurds and Arabs on its Western front, Baluch and Turkomans on its northern and eastern frontiers)—can ill afford to neglect its foreign, defense, and military sectors.

In the immediate period ahead, while the Islamic Republic is attempting to consolidate its rule, both the United States and the Soviet Union will probably avoid any direct activities in Iran. Both superpowers would be well advised to keep a low profile in Iran until the sandstorms of the Iranian Revolution settle down. Both the United States and the Soviet Union probably realize that such interference could have negative repercussions in their long-range relations with Iran.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Soviet successes and failures in Iran during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi illustrate broader changes in Soviet policy from overt expansionism to more subtle efforts at domination under the guise of "good neighborly relations."

The Soviet Union, despite several attempts since 1921, failed to establish by external force a permanent Soviet-style republic inside Iran. Although these attempts resulted in the creation of several short-lived republics in northern Iran, in each case Moscow retreated under pressure from other external powers interested in Iran.

A designed, aggressive, offensive Soviet policy in the Persian Gulf area has probably been shelved for the present time. However, rising Soviet demands for oil coupled with growing East European dependence on the Soviet Union and the Middle East for oil probably will tempt the Soviet Union to take more direct measures to expand its influence in the Persian Gulf area. Nevertheless, the complex, tangled regional political dynamics of the Persian Gulf area will likely prevent either the Soviet Union or the United States from achieving a successful prolonged domination of this area to the exclusion of the other. The level of Soviet or American

influence in individual countries of the Persian Gulf area will continue to vary, reflecting the changes in the international and regional system and the dynamics of US-Soviet relations. In this context, for example, Saudi Arabia may establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in the 1980's, and Iran will probably pursue a "nonaligned" policy in its dealings with both Moscow and Washington, while Iraq may pull further away from Moscow.

In any event, Soviet prospects for dismembering or dominating Iran appear dim. Any direct offensive attempt by the Soviet Union against Iran could lead to the resurgence of a high tension between the United States and the Soviet Union and perhaps even to another world war. Should such a war come, Iran once again, would likely become a crossroad or battleground for opposing superpowers and a bridge for defeat or victory of the Soviet Union. In both war and peace, Iran is a geostrategic reality of considerable importance to both Moscow and Washington, and an object of superpower rivalry which may yet again bring deep suffering upon the people of Iran.

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